

COUNCIL ON AGING

Susan P. Jacobs, Director

The Council on Aging is pleased to present its 2004 Annual Report to the residents of Dalton. Our department was established at the 1977 Annual Town Meeting, and has been serving our elders and their families for 28 years. The Council on Aging is a full-time town office, open Monday through Friday, 8:00-4:30 at 400 Main Street in the Dalton CRA. With staff members Patricia Pero, Outreach & Wellness Counselor and Administrative Assistant Beverly Benoit, we oversee our many on- and off-site activities in the community. In addition, we provide information on a wide range of programs and services, such as in-home help, transportation, health insurance and medical bills, leisure and volunteer opportunities. Over the past year, we have received over 5,000 requests for information from our over-60 population and their families.

Statistical Overview

Of Dalton's total population of 7017, 20.4% or 1,431 are age 60 and older. During this reporting year, our office provided 16,147 units of direct service to 608 residents over age 60 (47% of these were age 75 and over), and an additional 270 who were under age 60.

Budget

The challenges of continuing our services on reduced town funds were a hurdle to overcome in planning our FY2005 budget. Faced with a 5.4% cut in town funding, we will be dedicating our entire state grant of \$7,040 to staff time (Director: 2.5 hrs/wk; Clerical: 3 hrs/wk; Outreach: 3 hrs/wk). In addition, we will tap into our two revolving accounts to meet the rest of the shortfall. From the Transportation Account, we will be using \$11,291 for driver and clerical salaries, and \$2,000 will come from Program Donations to cover CRA labor for lunch and program set-ups.

From the Director

Attendance at meetings has become a regular part of my job. Meetings are held both locally for such groups as the Friends of the COA, Triad, COA Board, Sunday Lunch Steering Committee, Emergency Management, Hilltown Assoc., Elder Services Advisory Council, Designer Selection Committee and staff meetings (COA and town depts.), as well as out of the area for MCOA (our statewide COA organization) and WMACA (our regional COA group). Participation in these groups helps to keep me updated on current issues (local and statewide), and gives me access to other COA folks who have developed innovative programs to meet community needs similar to ours.

However, like all of the other 351 councils on aging in the state, our primary focus is on people. Some are clients that we follow on a regular basis; some participate in programs and others are family members and interested residents. The following are excerpts from some of my monthly reports to the COA Board.

"Many clients call with very little in the way of specific problems, but need reassurance. Bev, Pattie and I spend countless hours providing a shoulder and a little boost in confidence. We have some clients who apologize for calling for van service, feeling that there are so many others in more need of this help. Others don't want to 'bother' us for information, but can't seem to

find it anywhere else.

"One client calls almost every day after the mail comes. We have never seen anyone receive so many contest offers, requests for money and general 'junk' mail! It's been a very long process to educate this client to throw these things away. Now, instead of saying, "Should I send this in?" we hear, "You should see what I got today! Let me read it to you!" And then, proudly say that it's going in the waste basket.

"We also offer reassurance for our volunteers. Last summer the private drivers for a long time dialysis patient were very concerned about this client's health. Astroke followed by hospitalization and then an admission to a nursing home was carefully followed by these dedicated volunteers, who had become more than weekly drivers, but friends.

"Housing questions come fairly often. Dalton has a number of housing options for elderly and disabled folks and we often receive calls asking about them. It's not unusual to get a call from someone who thinks that we oversee the senior housing. We answer their questions and make the proper referrals, but always ask them to let us know how they make out."

Dalton Council on Aging Board of Directors

All that we do here at the COA would not be possible without the support and direction of our Board of Directors. They are a group of residents appointed by the Select Board to set the policy and direction of the COA; to help the staff identify community needs and to explore ways to meet those needs; and to educate themselves and our community. They are directly involved in many of our programs, giving freely of their time, talents and patience to improve the quality of life in Dalton.

Our Board is now at full capacity, with fifteen members working actively for the town through this department. The officers are: Tony Doyle, Chairman; Joyce Lacatell, Vice Chair.; Dana Becker, Clerk; and Dave Powell, Treasurer. The other members are Judy Brooks, Persis Caverly, Marjorie Lillpopp, Dick Nicholas, Helga Knappe, Dick Murphy, Marcia Brophy, Cora Cooney, Naomi Rauff, Sarah Frankland and Brian Staubach. When you see any of these wonderful folks, please thank them for their dedication to our town through the COA.

2004 Highlights

Dalton's "Boston Post Cane" was presented in January to our oldest resident, Dr. Frank Slowick, in time for his 103rd birthday. (The cane is on display in Town Hall in a beautiful case built by Select Board member Tim Kirby).

The April "Candidates Forum and Luncheon" was very well-attended, with ten local candidates participating as well as state candidates Denis Guyer and Dawn Taylor Thompson. All were asked to respond to the following in their statements: the issues that made you decide to run for this particular office; your thoughts on the Library/Senior Center/Museum Project; issues you feel you will face in this office; what you feel is positive about living in and serving Dalton; what state and federal issues will impact our community, and lastly, if you live to be 100, what kind of services do you hope will be available in Dalton? [The 2005 Candidates Luncheon and Forum will be held on May 5, 2005.]

Our annual Volunteer Recognition Event was held on May 18th in the St. Agnes Parish Hall. Each year, we recognize our volunteers (119 this year) for all of their work in and for our community, and choose one group for special recognition. Our 2004 recipient was the Berkshire Talking Chronicle. Based

here in Dalton on Depot Street, this program reaches out to the blind and visually impaired in our community and throughout the county, providing broadcasts of the local newspapers, magazines and other special programs via special radio receivers.

Our Dalton Police Department, with help from Triad presented their first "Citizen's Police Academy" in October and November. With eleven other local residents, I attended the eight week course, graduating on Nov. 23 with a greater understanding of the issues our police officers face on a daily basis. All of us in the class expressed our appreciation for their work in the schools and on the streets to keep our community safe. There are plans to hold another academy in spring, 2005, and I would encourage everyone to consider attending.

Two new events were introduced this year. In September we held a "90+ Birthday Party" in the dining room of the First Congregational Church. When we were putting together the list, we found 73 residents in Dalton in that age group, with the oldest being 103! Then, on November 9th, we invited our local veterans to our first "Veterans Luncheon." Twenty-five attended to receive our thanks for their service, to learn about the Veterans History Project, and to laugh over the list of "G.I. Jive" which included SOS, Hurry up and wait, Grunt, Ruptured ducks, Pin up girls, KP, Mess call, and SNAFU (which got the biggest laugh).

One area of recreation which we have been able to provide despite not having a senior center is a travel group. Dalton Travelers, under the capable direction of Jim and Catherine Rivers had five exceptional trips in 2004. The first was a day trip in March to an Irish Festival. Then in May, a one day excursion to the Marriott Hotel in Albany, NY, featured lunch and a program with John Davidson. In June, the group traveled to Montreal and Quebec City for a five day visit, and in October, they enjoyed an eight day trip to Canyon Country featuring Arizona and Utah, visits to three canyons and a two night stay in Vegas. In December, they traveled to Agawam for dinner and a Christmas show at Chez Josef. Plans for 2005 include an Irish Cabaret in March, a four day trip to Washington, DC, in April, and a twelve day trip to Alaska titled, "Voyage of the Glaciers."

Program Review

Our staff and Board of Directors steer the COA in the right direction, but it is our **Volunteers** who provide the energy to make most of the following programs possible. As I stated in the Volunteer Recognition report, we honor these dedicated individuals each May at this annual event. Without their efforts, we would be unable to provide the range of services for which Dalton has become known in the county. Grocery shoppers, friendly visitors, office helpers for mailings, etc., and all of the programs listed below improve the quality of life in our community. If you have talents you would like to share, please call us.

Triad continues to be an active group promoting education and information for our retired residents. Quarterly Public Information Meetings, an Annual Picnic and Safety Fair and regular monthly meetings provide a wealth of information on a wide range of topics which have included Self Defense, House Numbering, Neighborhood Watch, Identity Theft, Internet and other Scams. Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 1 PM at the Dalton VFW and are advertised in the Berkshire Eagle.

Wellness Programs are generally offered on the second Tuesday of each month at 11:45 AM by Pattie Pero, our Outreach and Wellness Counselor. This past year she addressed such topics as Fall Prevention, Heart Health, Stroke Prevention, Medicare Rx Cards, Aids Prevention, and Safe Fun in the Sun. She also did individual “Wellness” assessments (136) and education (155) this past year. In addition to Outreach, Pattie is our SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Information Needs of Elders) counselor, helping many residents resolve their problems with health insurance and billing errors.

Other **Health Clinics** held at the CRA included monthly Blood Pressure Clinics and the annual Flu Shot Clinic held by the Berkshire VNA, and Foot Care provided by Jane Kelley, RN, who retired in April, and Kip Moeller, RN, who has continued this fine service. Foot clinics are held on alternating months at the CRA and Pine Grove Manor on High Street. A total of 34 treatments were done during the CRA clinics.

The popular **Osteoporosis Prevention Exercise Classes** continue on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Cora Cooney leads the Tuesday afternoon group; Marjorie Lillpopp continues to teach on Tuesday nights, and I teach the Tuesday and Thursday morning classes. A total of 91 people participated in the program during 2004. We began offering this class in 1996, and its value is reflected in the numbers of people who continue to attend, and the referrals we continue to receive from area doctors and physical therapists.

The **Senior Meal Site** continues to host a small but dedicated group of folks on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Site Director Doris Fiorini, who had overseen the program for 9 years, retired in September with our heartfelt thanks for all her dedication to the program and the people it served. We now have Pricilla “Pat” Higgins and Jane Rozak who serve on Tuesdays, and Mary Anne LeVardi, our new site director, who volunteers on Thursdays. They are continuing the monthly Birthday Parties and Pizza Lunches, and invite local residents to join them. Information on menus and activities are published monthly in *Berkshire Schedules*, and each Monday in the *Berkshire Eagle*.

Sunday Lunch celebrated its 12th anniversary in March 2004. Host groups from the First Congregational Church of Dalton, St. Agnes, Dalton United Methodist, Grace Episcopal, Berkshire First Church of the Nazarene, Hinsdale Congregational and St. Patrick’s Churches, Dalton Rotary, Dalton COA Board of Directors and the Boy Scouts continue to serve hot meals every Sunday at 1 PM in the Congregational Church dining room. Many local and area people enjoy the social “Church Dinner” atmosphere instead of eating alone. The program is supported entirely by donations (this past year from Crop Walk, Thanksgiving Ecumenical Service, Grace Church Christians in Action, Wal Mart and the voluntary donations of those who come to eat). We also were able to restock our pantry with foods donated through the Letter Carriers Food Drive. This year, 1,615 meals were served by our host groups.

First Tuesdays have proven to be very popular here at the COA, because during the school year a class from St. Agnes School visits at lunch time to share instrumental music, poems and/or a song they’ve learned. Our special thanks go to teacher Karen Blefari and principal Theresa Dudziak for their enthusiastic support of these visits. Over the summer months we invited area leaders, with pharmacist Stan Walczyk and Acting Police Chief Larry Higgins joining us for lunch.

Other **Intergenerational Programs** included Bridges at Craneville School and the weekly Preschool Reading Program held at the Dalton United Methodist Church. The volunteers in these programs really enjoy their time with the children.

John Ostresh, Executive Director at **Dalton Community Cable**, has been a staunch supporter of our “On Track with the Dalton COA” TVprogram. John never misses a holiday party or other big event, bringing his equipment to tape the activity for showing on channel 16. I have not had as much time to devote to the taping of our interview format programs, but have done Project HEROAwith Lori Harrington and Lisa Avery, RMVwith Michele Ellicks, and the Elizabeth Freeman Center with Donna Morelli.

Serve New England is a food cooperative-style program that is built on volunteer service. In return for 2 hours of volunteer work (defined as anything you do for someone outside of your immediate family for which you are not paid), and \$20 for a Family Meal Package, you receive an assortment of high quality meats (frozen), fresh vegetables and fruits worth approximately \$35. Each Family Meal Package contains food for 4 meals for 4 people. Serve’s monthly newspaper carries meal plans with recipes and serving tips. We also have the Wild Duck Food Cooperative based here which carries a wide selection of bulk organic foods and other supplies. Over the past year, 185 people have taken advantage of these two programs.

LIFE (Living Is For the Elderly) has met twice a month at Craneville Place for ten years. Under the direction of Peri Caverly and Sarah Frankland, COABoard members, LIFE brings Dalton residents together with residents of Craneville Place for a one hour, organized round table discussion and refreshments. One regular participant was Dick Mullins who brought his keyboard and led a singalong each month. Other community participants included Kay Wood, Betty Clark, Ruth Moody, Harold Booth and Lucile Mason.

Dick Lacatell, working with the AARPTax Aide Program volunteered his services again last year to do taxes for 34 local retirees, several of whom qualified for the Circuit Breaker tax credit. Under the Circuit Breaker law, certain Massachusetts resident homeowners and tenants aged 65 and older may claim a tax credit when filing their state income tax. Qualified taxpayers may take a credit that is equivalent to the amount of real estate (and water/sewer) taxes paid in excess of ten percent of the taxpayer’s total income. For a tenant taxpayer, the payment of rent constituting real estate tax payment is 25% of the rent the tenant actually paid during the taxable year. Even if you haven’t filed taxes for years, you can file the state form only to get this refund.

The **COA Lift-Van** operates Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 4 PM, providing transportation for shopping, medical and other necessary appointments. Last year, 123 elderly and disabled residents received 4,182 van rides, with an additional 207 rides provided by our private drivers who fill in when the van is busy.

Goals

Celebrating the completion of my 20th year at the COAin August has given me an opportunity to look back at my time here, see the changes over the years, and

plan for the future of this department. COA Board member Judy Brooks and I continue to work with the Designer Selection Committee toward the realization of a new “Community Center” with a Library, Senior Center and Museum. This is an exciting time for these three departments and for the town, and is a project I am anxious to see through to completion.

A Council on Aging/Senior Center is a community focal point where older adults come together for information, services and activities. It also serves as a resource for the entire community for information on aging, support for family caregivers, advocacy and education. Your COA staff—Sue Jacobs, Bev Benoit and Pattie Pero, along with our van drivers and volunteers—all strive to provide the best services that meet our residents’ needs. If you have a question, or are concerned about an older family member, friend or neighbor, please call us at 684-2000. We are here to help.